

This Is Me

This is me with no apologies.

I'm exactly how I want to be.

This is me in reality.

I don't care what people think of me.



Lillian Bailey, 1st place
Category K-2, Grade 2



Lelia Corringham, Grade 6



Ash Clough, Grade 8



Kaylee Thornhill, Grade 8

Goodbye Winter, Hello Spring

Snow snow
Goodbye snow
Now we can watch
The flowers grow

Buds buds
Buds on trees
Now let's listen
For the honeybees

Rain rain
Here to stay
Now we smell it
And in puddles we play

Hands hands
In the ground
Now we feel
Seeds all around

Sun Sun
Grow the roots
Soon we'll taste
Fresh veggies and fruit

Spring spring
Hello spring
We're happy you're here
And for you we sing!

Ryland Lilly, 2nd place
Category K-2, Grade 1

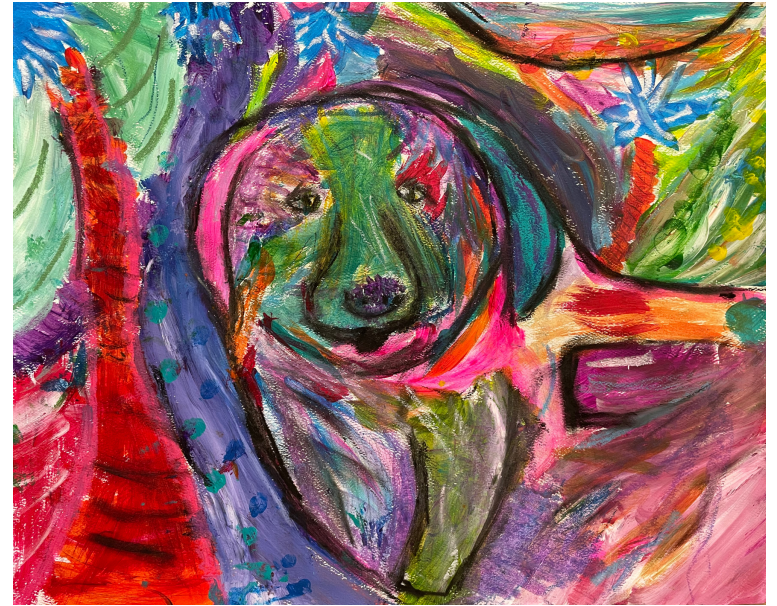
"Sound of Bushes"

squirrels rustling

breezy winds swaying in green

red yummy berries

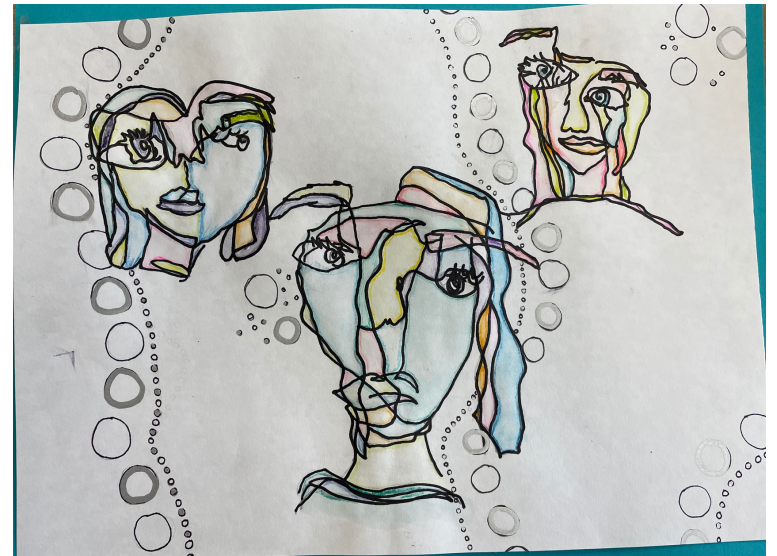
Fiona Baxley, 3rd place
Category K-2, Grade2



Alex Bernier, Grade 7



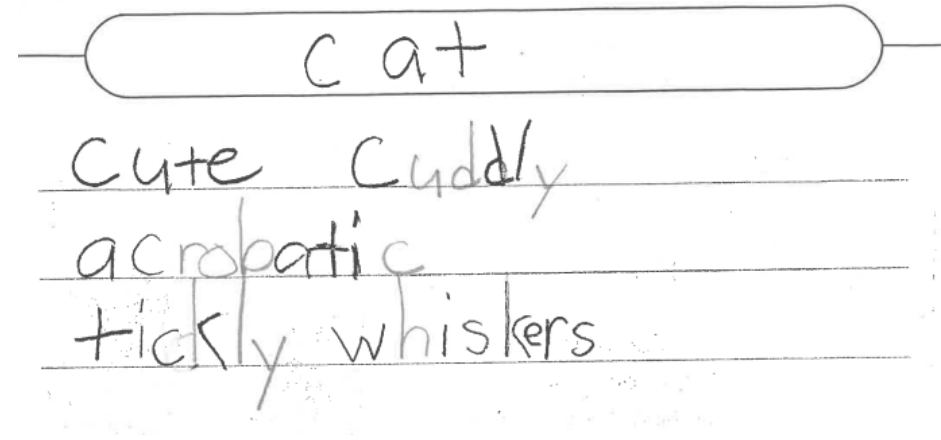
Sydney Belair, Grade 6



Emelia Froton, Grade 8



Maxwell Stice, Grade 6



Everly Bazo, Honorable Mention
Category K-2, Grade 2



Kennedy Belair, Grade 8



Nikita Romanyuk, Grade 8



Trevor Redman, Grade 5



Miranda Bingham, Grade 8

CASCO BAY FERRY

How perfect, right, that we talked
 about westerns & the blues
 & you recommended that Vietnamese
 restaurant at the far end of Congress
 which we'll probably go to on a night
 where we aren't so late to catch the ferry
 & when we get to Peaks Teddy
 is there with beers & the boys with
 their telescope at the shore feel like
 something out of Spielberg & when
 we climb the tower in the garden
 you give me a look like, *what is this*,
 you know? Imagine what
 the kitchen would look like with a bit
 of care, an evening in the Cuban room
 with those congas & all those
 brass frames & oh, when
 Mary Anne & Elizabeth & Chris tell us
 how lucky we are to be so young
 at the small fire & how we'll be alive
 to see the planet die you have
 the most beautiful response—unafraid
 of what this all means, how it shapes
 our poems & I love how our feet
 kind of touch when we take the 11:00
 ferry back to Portland & I know
 that this is the only way we should feel
 at the end of times.

Kevin Bertolero, Honorable Mention
 Category Adult, Dover, NH

LUCKY

One September afternoon, on a path above
the Atlantic, where we had just swum,
we passed a thicket of Joe Pye weed churning
with Monarchs. Their tigerish wings flapped softly

as they flicked their curled and narrow tongues
into the flowers' secrets for the long ride home,
while the six bent black legs held on.
It was tempting to call it magic, to be

the only audience for this amazement,
this mesmerizing, unchoreographed flow.
We kept our voices low, soft with awe.
A kind of luck seemed to enfold us.

And we watched those waves of vivid wings
until finally it got late and we followed the path
to a restaurant where we planned ourselves to feast,
which was closed for a private party.

Elizabeth Goldman, 3rd place
Category Adult, Dover, NH

I wish winter would come

I wish winter would come
I wish I could throw another snowball
I wish I could have a cup of hot cocoa
I wish I could build a snow fort with friends
I wish I could go sledding down a hill a mile high of snow
I wish I could go zooming down a mountain on skis
I wish I could cross-country ski again
I wish that I could snow-shoe through the woods
I wish that I could build another snowman
I wish the snow would fall again

Eden Abood, 1st place
Category 3 & 4, Grade 4



Abzal Baizhumanov, Grade 5

The Principal

Kyra Small, Grade 8

When I walk in, I see him.

The principal!
It's odd I know, I thought I was
on a behavior roll!

But, no, no, no, my reputation had to
go!

He seats me on a wooden chair,
it's all I can do to not scream and
flair.

I freely sweat head to toe- I hope
he doesn't notice though!

When his eyes are fixed on me, I
try to fill mine with glee, even
if I consider running up a tree!

From what I have heard, you'd
be a nerd to defy the principal.

Then, he asks me the dreaded question:
"May I ask why you're here?"
I swallow in fear.

There's only one thing to do; "You're
shoes
look bad, I said to Mary Lue, and
she got mad! I thought of apologizing,
but I refused. But, I should have,
I'm realizing!"



What If?

If I were a school bell, loud and ringing bright
I'd ring all day, and all night long to make the world seem light.
If I were a ruler, straight as straight can be
I'd line up all the alphabet and make a secret key.
If I were a letter home, reaching mom and dad
I'd tell them how I love them so, and please not to be sad.
If I were a crayon, colored like the sky
I'd draw a dream for you and me. Please don't ask me why.
If I were a school child, just as you are now
I'd pray for war to end, and soon; but couldn't say just how.

Gretchen Knight, 2nd place
Category Adult, Dover, NH

Of the leftovers from a meal no one remembers.
Boxes of pears for the neighbors, peeled apples for the grandchildren,
A single spiral of crimson skin, pulled away from an ivory-colored fruit.
Clean sheets for the guest bedroom. A small rowboat
Propped up against the shed, just in case that flood ever comes.

She bears the tradition of trying to stay alive,
Where love is not word for speaking, but instead a name
For the person that inhabits it.
It takes 13 strokes to write the character 愛.
Above is a hand, reaching down to a heart
Nestled under a roof.
Though it once was, Chinese is not a language of drawings
If it was, A-ma could draw an unused boat, a box of pears,
A long spiral of apple skin,
And call it love.
Before pictures loosened into a language,
Before A-ma was born,
The act of reaching for a heart
Was the closest thing there was to expressing it.

Andrew Yang, 1st place
Category Adult, Dover, NH

For a moment he just looks at me.
(But not the way that would make me
want to run up a tree.)

He smiles at me.

"Just give her an apology and you'll
be free."

So I did as he said, and when
I went to bed, I dreamed a good
dream: Just the principal and me.

Elsa Walsh, 2nd place
Category 3 & 4, Grade 3



Sadie Wagoner, Grade 7

The Night of Halloween....

The leaves have fallen,

The wind is loud, the breeze is restless.

It's cold out now!

The spirits are loose, but hiding, then BOO!

It's Halloween now!

The moon was full,

It was a spooky night.

There were kids screaming in such fright.

"Trick or treat" they would screech,

Then go home to their spooky sweets.

Drew Allen, 3rd Place
Category 3 & 4, Grade 3

And they would sit quietly in our lungs
As we hold our breaths until the storm ends.
你. I feel my throat rise, an upward lilt with lifted hands,
Breaching the calm water's surface,
To catch a response it will never receive

Because 我愛你 is the end of a sentence,
The end of a thought, the end of a sentiment
That means, definitively, love, but trails on
Like a rising scale that never stops, until
All we hear is a light tapping, a phantom note
On the far edge of a piano. I've learned this silence after-the-fact
Is itself a type of love.

And then we are left where we started—

我愛你。

A possibility, a fall, a redemption
An I, a love, a you
Reduced to a dipping line, strung from you to me,
The weight of love passed in between,
Heavy, hardly-spoken intimacies passed through slack telephone wires
On a warm, clear night. Which is to say it is rare.
What isn't to say it isn't true.

I called my grandmother A-ma,
A rising question, a definite response,
"A-ha!" Like her name was a moment of triumph
Like she was a triumph.
Her real name was 愛,
The word for love.
The way a name lifts off the tongue
And binds itself into a form resembling its owner,
Like she was love. She is

Staying in the kitchen as people ate.
"Sit down," we insist, but she points us to our bowls,
Adjusts the radio, wipes off the counter.
A cupboard full of Oreos, oolong in a teapot,
In the attic, bundles of bamboo chopsticks, plastic spoons, takeout napkins,
Arranged and labeled, a careful inventory

An anatomy of Chinese love

Truly, it is impossible to say “I love you” in Mandarin.
Still, word for word, the Chinese language accommodates
the sentiment: 我愛你¹

我 (wǒ): a proposition less than a statement
An inflection of the tongue without the certain
Downward force of “I” or “me”
The character “我” in written form is a hand and a dagger-axe
Strung together like socks on a clothesline
How we construct ourselves out of the things
That defend us, that hurt others.
Every time I refer to myself, I am a wavering question,
Sharpened on the curve.

愛 (ài): a focused kind of gravity,
The narrowing mouth, the closing teeth,
Cheeks pulled aside to funnel
“Ah” into “Ee”, a reduction of open tone
Tapered into a concentrated ring.

The way the body drops with the sound,
The sound I would imagine a body to make,
Taking the bullet that was meant to pass through me.
愛, which is what it feels like to love,
To say love, in Chinese:
Distilled, pointed, undiluted.
My grandmother was named 愛.
She was none of these things.

你 (nǐ): a question mark in response
To the exit wound that 愛 leaves behind,
Which is not the same thing as an answer.

To say “you” in Mandarin is to breathe.
To direct the word “love” toward someone is to inhale
A gasp between unrelenting waves.
If the air is so rare, we pull our lovers into our wind stream

¹ This is romanized as *wǒ ài nǐ*. The diacritics reflect inflections in the pronunciation

Sierra Hutchinson, Grade 8



Little Leaf
Little leaf falling
Falling from its tree so high
Fly, fly, little leaf

Eleanor Cullinane, Honorable Mention
Category 3 & 4, Grade 4

Erin DelloRusso, Grade 8



Euphoric

Euphoria, a soaring flight,
A feeling that sets our spirit alight.
A sense of joy that's hard to contain,
Making every worry and fear mundane.

A rush of adrenaline, a wave of bliss,
A thrilling sensation that's hard to miss.
Like a lighthouse, it guides our hearts,
Illuminating our minds in every part.

The world around us fades away,
As we bask in euphoria's incredible sway.
Our problems become insignificant,
For this moment, we're truly resplendent.

It's a feeling that can't be controlled,
A cosmic dance within our soul.
A moment that we all deeply yearn,
A flame that we all wish to burn.

Euphoria, beyond measure and compare,
The essence of a life that we ought to share.
A gift that we all have the power to give,
By living life with passion and letting our hearts live.

Julia Clough, Honorable Mention (tie)
Category 11 & 12, Grade 11



Christopher Patterson, Grade 8



A Girl's World

When a man leaves his house, all he needs to do is grab his keys
When a woman leaves, she must bring a form of self defense, share her location with
others, and consider clothing that conceals the fact that she is a woman.

A man can walk to his car with ease

while a woman must check that nobody is around, underneath, or even inside her car.

Women are essential.

They carry life.

Future generations of presidents,

first responders,

doctors,

chemists,

teachers,

and important societal figures.

A girl's world is more meaningful than one may think.

Kiley Gionet, Honorable Mention (tie)

Category 11 & 12, Grade 11

I am from shooting hoops,
from the ball bouncing off the black pavement and nothing but
net shots

I am from the lyrics to music,
from the ukulele and its melody

I am from the pages flipping from one story to another,
from the words making pictures and the sound of
a book ending to a new one beginning

I am from the jewelry I make,
from the small beads to big beads and the colors of string
I use

I am from Youth 2 Youth I do,
from doing Samantha Skunk and the truth lessons we do

I am from the warm days of the year,
from cute clothes and swimming

I am from my pets,
from the furry cats and dogs and scaly lizard

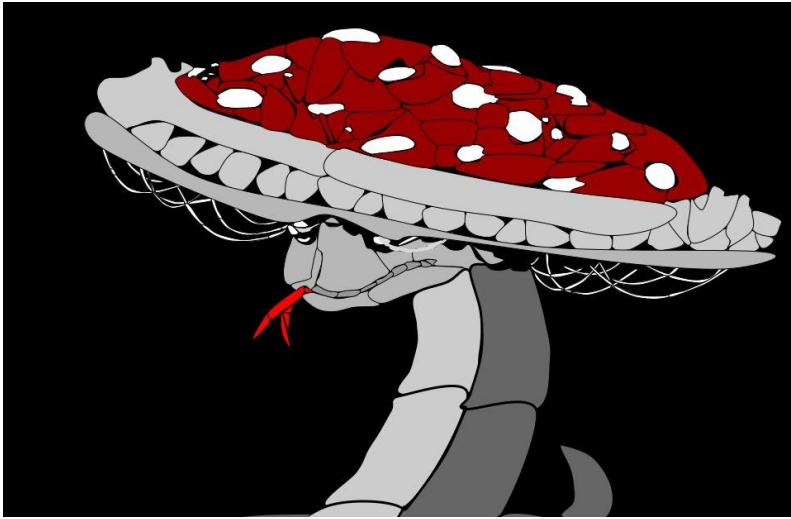
I am from the people supporting me,
from my friends and family

I am from the memories,
from the memories and moments I would not trade.

This is where I'm from

Sascha Cottle, 1st place

Category 5 & 6, Grade 6



Jayde Gottschalk, Grade 7

Growing up is a journey, a winding road we take,
Filled with ups and downs, with joy and heartbreak.

We start as children, innocent and free,
With dreams and hopes as far as we can see.
We learn to crawl, to walk, to run,
To speak our minds and have some fun.

But soon we find that life's not fair,
And heartache comes, beyond repair.
We lose some loved ones, say goodbye,
And tears we shed, we cannot deny.

Yet still we grow, we learn and thrive,
With every fall, we rise and strive.
We gain new friends, we find new love,
And soar like eagles, high above.

With time we learn, we come to know,
That growing up is not a show.
It's a journey that we all must take,
With every step, a choice to make.

We choose to be kind, to love and care,
To laugh out loud, to be aware.
We choose to live, to chase our dreams,
To be the best we can, it seems.

So as we grow, let's not forget,
The lessons learned, the times we've met.
Let's cherish every moment we've had,
The good, the bad, the happy and sad.

For life's a journey, a winding road we take,
And growing up is just the first step we make.



Sathvik Sakamuri, Grade 6

Jacob Bernier, 3rd place
Category 11 & 12, Grade 11

On the field of play, with sticks and balls
Where warriors gather to heed the call
A game of grace, a game of might,
A dance of skill, under daylight.

With sticks that flash, with bodies that twist,
In a battle of speed, they can resist,
The thrill of the chase, the rush of the race,
The challenge of the game they must embrace.

So let us honor, this ancient game,
That bears the name, of lacrosse's fame,
With sticks and balls, and warriors bold,
A tale of courage, forever told.

Landon Gray, 2nd place
Category 11 & 12, Grade 11



Jaydin Hapgood, Grade 5

The Pursuit

*Slithering, creeping under the bushes,
Yellow eyes—staring through tiny slits.
Around the clearing, it dashes
Slinking toward me—closer and closer it flits.*

*It strikes—fangs a blur of pearly white,
Jaws open wide as it soars across the clearing.
I swerve—it lunges in spite,
Terribly shaken, I go into hiding.*

*Pivoting—Seething as it searches,
Spotting me as I scamper away.
Without a warning, it lurches,
In a swift motion toward the place I lay...*

He woke up—covered in sweat and breathing fast,
Couldn't help but notice the stuffed snake,
He told himself it was a dream but the eyes—wide and vast,
Etched into his vision—but very much fake.

Prasan Sundaravadivel, 2nd place
Category 5 & 6, Grade 5

Lunar Peace

THE MOON GLOWS BEAUTIFUL ONE STARRY NIGHT
ALL AROUND THE WORLD ONE BEAUTIFUL MOON
NO SUNSHINE ANYWHERE, MISSING DAYLIGHT

YET STILL PEACEFUL AS THE BIRDS TAKE FLIGHT
WE LISTEN ALONG TO THEIR LITTLE TUNE
ALL THE WORLD HAS NO REASON TO FIGHT

WORLDWIDE PEACE, SO CALM THAT ONE STARRY NIGHT
WHETHER OR NOT IT'S FIVE O'CLOCK OR NOON
TWINKLING STARS SHINING, LIKE DIAMONDS WHITE

DESPITE WHAT THEY SAY, NO MATTER THE HEIGHT
IT SEEMS SO CLOSE AS THE LULLABIES CROON
THAT LUNAR CRESCENT, WHAT A LOVELY SIGHT

POURING OUT PEACE THROUGH LUMINESCENT LIGHT
A SENSE OF QUIETNESS, NO ONE'S IMMUNE
IT HITS YOU HARD, THAT FEELING OF DELIGHT

THAT CALMING SCENE, WITH THE DREAD OF FIRST LIGHT
THE RETURN OF SLEEP, OR THE AFTERNOON
SMILES FADING, FACES GETTING ALL TIGHT
STAY WITH THAT PEACE OF OUR ORB OF THE NIGHT

Megan Merrigan, 3rd place
Category 5 & 6, Grade 6

Starlings' Song

Together we must go, together,
In raw, mercurial unison.
One creature, one being
That ripples as it soars.

Together we will form a cloud,
One hundred humming wings against the sky,
Condense and expand like a heartbeat,
Until we alight with a breath.

Together we will watch in quiescence.
Who leads our flight? Who guides our way?
That is our secret, whispered in each flutter of our feathers.
At a soft, slight signal, we form a murmuration.

Together we will dance in freedom,
Fill the atmosphere like boundless wisps of smoke,
Dip and swoop and swirl across the cosmic stage,
One hundred iridescent stars, together.

Madeline Eaton, 1st place
Category 11 & 12, Grade 11

Unexpected Change

A sudden draft, A vicious blow,
Shaking and shifting a person's life as so.
The normalcy we always knew is in ruins,
Cast into the unknown, no more illusions.

The winds of change, they do not ask,
They sweep in fiercely, without a mask.
They tear apart our best-laid plans,
And leave us to pick up the strands.

The heart may ache, the mind may race,
As we try to find a steady pace.
For every step feels like a test,
In this life that's so un-guessed.

But even in the darkest night,
There can be a spark of light.
A glimmer of hope that shows the way,
To brighter skies and a better day.

So take a breath, embrace the change,
And find the strength to rearrange.
For in this life, we all must grow,
And face the winds that come and go.



Grace Dean, Grade 8

Giana Leonardi, Honorable Mention
Category 9 & 10, Grade 9

Alone

Orange is the morning dawn,
so vibrant and full of beauty.
The dinner awning is teal,
easy to see in the dusky morning light.
White are the fluorescent lights hanging from the ceiling,
decorated with whirls and swirls.
My coffee is black,
I sip it sadly, lonely,
I am alone.
Golden is my pastry,
Its edges crusted to light brown perfection.
Gray clouds gather,
Looming ominously like my thoughts.
Blue are the falling rain drops.
They fall like my sorrows into potholes and puddles.
Someone walks in closing a lush red umbrella.
Yellow raincoat and dripping hat are hung up.
Smooth skin, cherry lips, brown hair, green eyes,
a goddess comes down from the heavens to sit
with me.
The rain stops.
My sorrows stop with them.
Green blooms pop,
and so does green love.
I am no longer alone.

Evangeline Anella, Honorable Mention
Category 5 & 6, Grade 6

Edges.

Freeing me,
the sharp edge rips
across the frozen surface.
I can hear the echo
of the blade
as it leaves a deep scar,
it runs along the ice
my eyes follow the curve
my dancing blades have carved.
I feel the movement
of the boot pulling the edge
as my foot guides it
carefully, purposefully.
Light is seemingly flying
As I spin
My body moves faster,
arms dancing in the air.
The blade of my skate
guides my mind
across the ice.
I fly,
landing, once again,
on the sharp blade.
It scars the ice,
memories of movement,
dreams of dancing,
my blade carefully carves
as its on its way
towards stealing my heart.

Cadence Gervais, 3rd place
Category 9 & 10, Grade 9

unknown from ME

I strive to blend in, to assimilate,
But it's a battle that I cannot evade,
I've tried my whole life to fit in the mold,
But it never works out, or so I am told.

Yet colors now feel more the same,
Harder to be someone I can't claim,
They say it's tough to rouse a sleeping soul,
But no one asked me to play this role.

Red, Yellow, Blue, White,
Colors that signify my life's might,
Passion, Confidence, Strength, Optimism,
Some stronger than others, in the prism.

But I won't deny my own reflection,
I'm unique, a blend of perfection,
It's tough to understand my roots,
Especially when no one offers any fruits.

I'm too this to be that, too that to be this,
Lost in between, sometimes hard to miss,
I'm not even a stereotype, it's true,
Can't sing or grasp STEM, like others do.

Even with friends, I feel out of place,
Invisible, like I'm from outer space,
It's a struggle to understand who I am,
But being different is not a sham.

Everything I'm not, makes me everything I am,
A Filipino-American, like a pearl in a clam,
So, I embrace my unique identity,
It's my pride, my power, my true entity.



Dover Middle School student, Grade 8

Jaeden Sertimo Cervantes, 2nd place
Category 9 & 10, Grade 10

Of Matches and Candles

A Match lit a candle
 Its flames
 devouring the wick with its fiery mane
 While the Match
 crumbles into ashes
And its light fades away

It dies wild
 and free
 Like a horse
 on a silver field

The Candle watches the Match.
The Candle stays controlled.
The Candle stays contained.
Her flames hover around the room like a ballerina.
They are Her beauty.
They are also Her chains.

The Match lies on the black charr-stained floor
And The Candle
Gazes from above.

She believes Herself to be eternal,
She believes Herself to be better.

...

Isn't She?

Maybe there's a little spark in Her.
 Deep.
 Deep.
 Deep
 down.

That longs to be the Match.
That wishes She could know how it feels to burn
so brilliantly,
so brightly,
And so freely.

Sara Pellenz, 1st place
Category 7 & 8, Grade 8

Take a Walk

I'm just a speck of dirt
Or that's just what it seems
But I've come here to complain
Of certain human atrocities

Your creatures make a mess
And you just let it be
You tear up all the grass
What's nature going to eat?

You carve out all this space
What for? Concrete
You take good soil out
And make it obsolete

For now I'm just a pillow
Cushioning your feet
But this petition's far from over
Just hear it from the trees

You take down loads of forest
You chop and slice and hack
You ruin many habitats
And rarely plant us back

You grind us up for fuel
All day without reprieve
You forget that without us
You couldn't even breathe

Your children hang on branches
And pull off all our leaves
They never stop to think
Of what all that achieves

But for now we are a whisper
Wind rattling through our hair
But we won't sit in silence
Just hear it from the air

With factories and smoke
You fill me up with smog
Too many times to count
Natural resources you hog

You harness me all day
Not that I really mind
But using me for ill
Is just not very kind

You warm me up with greenhouse gas
Methane you release
I long for the old days
When atmosphere could be at peace

But for now I'm just a breath
Wind blowing on your back
But hear it from the water
Whom you've been turning black

You spill in and pollute us
Pulling fish onto the shore
We are a vital habitat
You don't care anymore

We are a natural beauty
Wonder twinkling in your eyes
You take us so for granted
You don't even realize

You're warming up the oceans
Floods and hurricanes you cause
Marine life dying everyday
But you just don't hit pause

But for now we're all a rhythm
All life under the sun
And when you take a walk
Then suddenly we're one

Ainsley Eaton, 1st place
Category 9 & 10, Grade 10



Erin DelloRusso, Grade 8

Those Summer Nights

Soft vibrations sending me slowly,
 Into a hypnotic state,
 Causally exiting to the slight hum from the driver,
 Or the occasional scream of a perfect lyric,
 And the synchronized hand beats to the drums,
 My head cloudy with sun, sand, and salt.

Little whispers from the windows,
 Gently talking on my slightly burned face,
 My little wisps fluttering in those gentle voices,
 Flip flops on the dash,
 Hands behind my head,
 Bare arms and legs,
 Soaking up remaining vitamin D,
 Casting through those big bright golden rays,
 Leaving the sky,
 In flashes of yellows,
 Oranges,
 And Pinks,
 The closing scene of the last act,
 With a perfect ending.

My skin in its perfect summer prime,
 Golden,
 Soft,
 Silky,
 Glowing,
 Emitting the sun's leftover heat
 A Warm honey gloss,
 Staining my skin,
 Altering my pigmentation.

A faint scent of waves and salt,
 The one that surrounds all those little beach towns,
 The one that envelopes all your summer memories by the water,
 Entering my nose,
 And my body,
 Tingling the rest of my senses,
 And Settling in my bones.

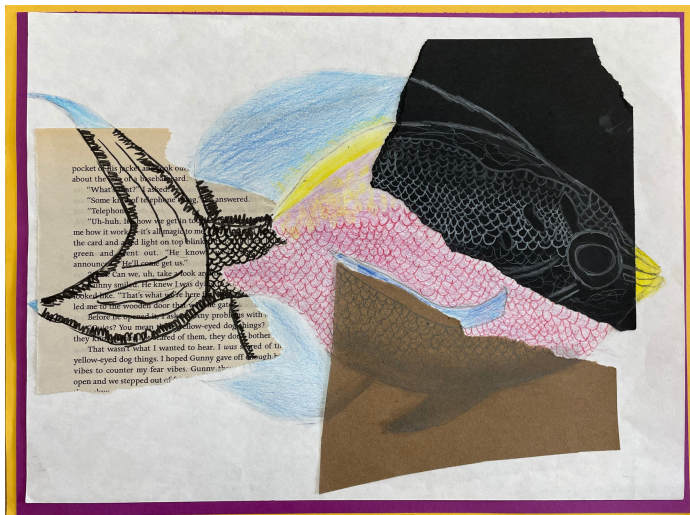
My hair hardened and glazed,
 Lightened and bleached,

Sticky and salty,
 Crusted and crispy,
 Like a crown made of the elements of this beach
 Telling everyone: I was in the ocean all day,
 Giving me the title of Beach Bum,
 Making me a queen,
 The people of this town my subjects
 The ocean my kingdom,

In the distance,
 The disappearing place,
 We were just mere moments ago,
 Capturing our memories of the sun drenched day,
 And never letting them slip away,

Speakers blasting with those great creators of summer,
 Marley, Adams, Beach Boys, Danny and Sandy,
 Their words,
 The sounds,
 Setting the stage,
 For the upcoming,
 Unforgettable,
 Experiences.

Addison Carbone, 2nd place
 Category 7 & 8, Grade 8



Connor Marcem, Grade 7

i'm really grown up
 this feels surreal
 i cook my own dinners
 i walk to my own bus stop
 the training wheels are off
 but i don't want to move an inch
 i'm not ready for the world
 there's too many possibilities
 too many chances that i'll mess up
 but i just have to dive right in
 ignoring my concerns
 my parents are really proud of me
 but i miss being a little girl
 i have a life ahead of me
 i should be eccentric to learn
 all sorts of tricks and tips
 to battle the cruel world
 soon i'll graduate with my cap and gown
 the hourglass is ticking
 i don't know how much time is left
 before i move out and leave the comfort of the nest
 maybe i'll live off in a big town
 opportunities surrounding me
 and maybe i'll find my missing puzzle piece
 i might just be dramatic
 i just want to do my best
 my future lies ahead of me
 i still have some growing to do
 if only i could piece the lost girl back together
 i really am longing to
 i'm walking blindfolded
 down a confusing and troubling road
 years feel like seconds
 the places i still need to go
 i'm constantly changing
 the search continues on and on
 for the answer to who i am
 i've tried almost everything
 have i found myself yet?

Shelby Cena, Honorable Mention
 Category 7 & 8, Grade 7

life just isn't fair
she grew up too
she became me now
from a caterpillar to a butterfly
all i wanted to do was help
i still carry parts of her with me
i can't seem to let her pieces go
why?
i really don't know
it's scary to be a butterfly
in a great big world
i have to learn everything myself
i'm no longer the little girl
time flew faster than i thought it would
my thoughts are in a swirl
i don't have that time machine
i can't help the longing lost girl
oh how confused she must be
but i know she'll try her hardest
she'll push through the rockiest of roads
she'll learn a lot along the way
her life sure won't be perfect
but she does her best to behave
i know her so well
i was once her
i know her favorite everythings
she's such a sweet girl
how she tied her shoes with two bunny ears
how she wanted to be just like her mom and dad
the mermaid games she played in the pool
her hatred for thunder and storm
i look in the mirror
i can't just see myself
i look and i see her
her little dimples
her light freckles
and soft brown hair
i blink and she disappears
i stare dumbfounded at the mirror
what have i become?
my once bubbly personality is simmered down to calm and collected

Till All Is Ash

the "fff"	tips of shaped sugar
of the match	are tickled to warm
grazing the box to chase	brown yet golden mess on a stick.
the flame,	flames twisting and turning
the overwhelming	'round and 'round never breaking this
amount of heat at the tips	endless cycle.
of your fingers.	the delicious pin prickling,
dropping melting matches	skin tickling sensation of excitement
to a neat stack	from engaging head-on with
of dried out wood	the barbaric beast.
begging to topple over.	sparklers shed
filling air we breathe with the past	glowing embers
of decade-old trees.	in lazy attempts to tame
covering close surroundings	the ferocious fire.
with a cloud of thick, black smoke	placing more and more wood
from sharp snaps of sleepless flames.	to fuel the flames just so this
flames that dance	lasts a little longer.
from log to sick	before letting it calm down
and back again never ending	and the mood changes completely,
till all is ash.	everything is quiet and calm.
ears bleeding	as faces covered in exhaust and minds
from crackling	foggy from a long day
of deconstructing wood.	of elated events start
heat radiating	preparing tired bodies
a blanket big enough to engulf	to head inside all
anyone close.	bug bitten and sticky,
a beautiful yet almost unbearable burn	and finally
dances through pairs of pink lungs while	the sweet "tssss"
smiling faces glow bright orange and	of a beast
	laid to rest.

Ashlynn Magnusson, 3rd place
Category 7 & 8, Grade 8

this is my sincere apology
i'm sorry i really didn't mean to
i lost her, she's really gone
it's such a confusing thought
i really am left speechless
she slipped out of my grasp
she never leaves my mind
she once stood where i do today
it felt like she was here yesterday
every breath i take would've been hers
every thought i think belongs to her
i guess she got lost somewhere along the way
maybe she's off chasing butterflies in a field
maybe if i look hard enough, i'll find little pieces of her here
some days an old video of hers pops up on my phone
her silly dances and her cute singing
her little feet rampaged restlessly across the house floors
her life was organized and fun
she had everything i could ever want
but her silly giggles slowly faded away
her stuff sits in dusty boxes, tucked away in attics and basements
everyone knew it was coming, how could i be so naive?
they say it happens faster than you expect, i guess i took that for granted
it's so sad to see
my parents will no longer wake up to nursery rhymes on the tv
or toys spread out across the floors belonging to that little girl
my parents must really miss her, i do too
their little girl is off to school, gone when they awaken
their little girl is too busy with her friends on the weekend
their little girl is confused
she doesn't know what to do
they ask, "what happened to that little girl?"
their words pain my ears
the drives to the park become rides to the mall
family movie nights turn into nights where she's off at sleepovers with her friends
her chocolate milk and apple juice turns to expensive teas and coffees
playing games on her tablet has turned to endless scrolling on her phone
her eager rushing to the dinner table is now "i need five more minutes mom"
it's like she's just gone back in her shell
and she's scared to come back out
her favorite things about herself are now some of my biggest insecurities

i don't want to let her down, i try so hard
i can't go a day without her crossing my mind
she grew up too fast
i am her
i grew up too fast
and it really sucks to see
i can no longer shelter myself under my parents' wings
they say people change
i guess i thought it was all phony
her little giggles and chatter
have turned to silence from me
my parents say their proud
and that time really flew
but would she be so happy if she was the one who knew?
she had everything i wanted
i wanted it back
can i have it now?
is it too late to ask?
i wish i had a time machine
if i could just go back
the conversations that we could have
i would have hugged her
and squeezed her so tight
the poor lost little girl
is she ready for life?
there's a rocky road ahead of her
oh ow i wish i could've been there
to comfort her when she cries
and to help her decide what to wear
to walk her to and from school
to help prevent her major mistakes
to keep her innocence
to put her in a good place
to brightly sing along to her favorite songs
going on car rides with the windows rolled down
to give her the dream life, the one i wish i had
to watch her little footprints trail behind her in the sand
and i would make sure to always hold her hand
but now i'm all grown up
and i don't have time to spare
i'm either off at school or adventuring around town